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LETTER DATED 14 APRIL 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 14 April 1999 addressed to you from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, Mr. Alexander Downer, concerning the detention of two Australian humanitarian assistance workers by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would arrange for the text of the letter to be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Penny WENSLEY
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

99-10594 (E) 140499

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Annex

Letter dated 14 April 1999 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia addressed to the Secretary-General

I am sure you are aware that two Australians, Steve Pratt and Peter Wallace, working for the humanitarian aid organization Care Australia, have been detained in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia since 31 March. We were informed yesterday by the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that they will be charged with spying offences.

I have told the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia here in Canberra that the accusations against the two Australians are preposterous and I have assured him that after extensive inquiries both here and overseas we have no evidence whatsoever that either of them engaged in intelligence activities as apparently alleged by the Yugoslav Government. Their arrest and the manner in which one of the two was paraded before the TV cameras on 10 April allegedly confessing to such activities suggests that the Yugoslav Government is embarked on a propaganda stunt designed to boost its stocks in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and possibly to undermine the position of humanitarian NGOs operating in Kosovo and elsewhere in the country.

Under the circumstances, I am appealing to you personally to use your good offices to do what you can to obtain access to the two men and to assist in securing their release. To this point, Australian Embassy officials in Belgrade have been denied consular access to them. We do not even know their precise whereabouts. Bearing in mind the implications of this situation for continuing humanitarian operations in the region, including those conducted under the auspices of the United Nations, it would in my view be entirely appropriate for you to appeal to the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to release the men.

I would appreciate it very much if you were able to assist us in any way in this matter.

(Signed) Alexander DOWNER